



When I Was Puerto Rican

Esmeralda Santiago

Teacher's Guide

Written By Mary Ellen Snodgrass



LIVING LITERATURE SERIES

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Synopsis

Prologue: How to Eat a Guava

Ripe guavas retrieve a memory from Esmeralda "Negi" Santiago's childhood. As an adult in New York, she gravitates toward the predictability and bittersweetness of American apples and pears.

Jibara

At age four, Negi lives with her family in Macún in a dirt-floor hut on stilts. Under the control of a stern mother, she and younger sisters Delsa and Norma learn obedience. Negi is named for her paternal aunt, Titi Merín. Negi gathers eggs while her father installs a floor. A few mornings later, Mami gives birth with the aid of a neighbor, Doña Lola.

Fighting Naked

Negi's parents fight more after their son Héctor is born. When Papi goes to town, he doesn't return for days. They argue over money. She lambastes him for his puta (whore) and the woman's daughter. Mami tosses his clothes out the door and pours water on them, then washes them the next day. Papi tells Negi that he visits his daughter Margie in Santurce. Margie moves to New York with Provi, her mother. Negi learns of men's shamelessness. On her entry to school, she wears a green and yellow uniform, which she projects during schoolyard fights. On the fourth day of school, Mami moves the family to the city.

Someone Is Coming to Take Your Lap

In Santurce outside San Juan in the early 1950s, Negi's family lives in a barrio with Grandmother

Tata. At a new school, Negi is known for being wild and loud. Her classmates call her a jíbara (hick). At Christmas, Mami cooks for relatives. The family does not attend church. Mami gives birth to Alicia and shuns Papi when he visits. He convinces her to return to Macún, where Negi is happy to be with best friend Juanita Marín. Negi is aware of Jurutungo, a community of seductive women. She

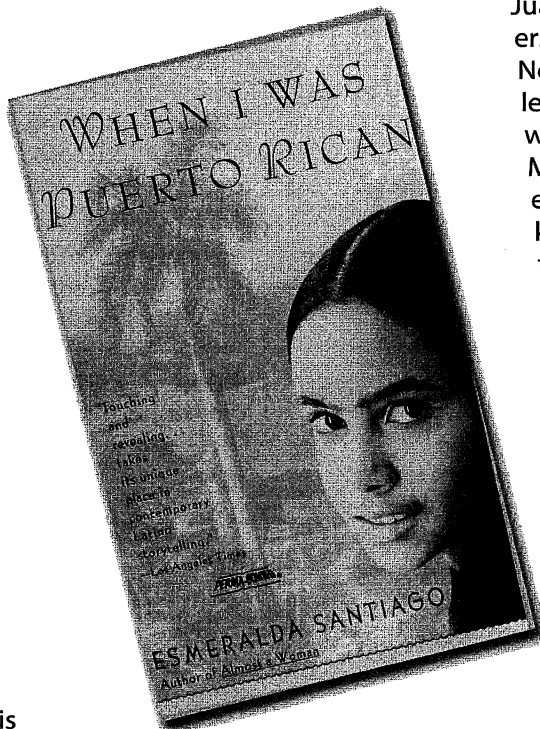
listens to the storytelling of Berto, Juanita's grandfather. Papi delivers the eulogy at Berto's funeral. Negi learns that Mami's mother left Puerto Rico for New York when Negi was a toddler. When Mami gives birth to Edna, Papi equips the house with a kerosene stove. Mami shows the children how to frolic in the first rain of May.

The American Invasion of Macún

Negi studies English in Miss Jiménez's class. Six days a week, the Free Associated State provides free breakfast and toothbrushes and lessons in nutrition and hygiene at the community center. Mami receives instruction about internal parasites and carries home two bags of groceries containing unfamiliar

foods—peanut butter, cornflakes, fruit cocktail, canned peaches, beets, tuna, grape jelly, and pickles. She purges the children of worms. The school nurse vaccinates them against polio. The social programs result from politicians seeking election. Papi informs Negi that calling an American a gringo is insulting. He tells her that Columbus discovered Puerto Rico, which became a Spanish colony. In 1898, the United States seized the island.

At the communal kitchen, Mrs. García serves powdered eggs, sausages, canned juice, and bread with margarine. Negi learns to sing "Are You Sleeping?"



"My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean," and "America the Beautiful." Papi installs a cement floor in the new kitchen. Tati sends ten dollars and a box of used clothing from New York. Negi writes a thank-you note. A serving of peanut butter stirred into powdered milk causes her to vomit. At home, she faints and lies sick in bed for days.

Why Women Remain Jamona

Mami readies Negi for a visit to her abuela (grandmother) in Santurce. Papi describes a religious clerk as the typically crazy jamona (unmarried woman). When Papi leaves, Negi realizes that the visit is a ruse for him to court other women. She feels used. To conceal her hurt, she slams the door on her fingers. Abuela teaches Negi to crochet. Abuelo sells oranges from a cart at Calle San Cristóbal in Old San Juan. Abuela takes Negi to mass.

On Sunday afternoon, Papi fails to come for Negi. She is not surprised as his negligence. She learns to pray the Lord's Prayer and to cross herself. Mami comes to the city for Negi and reports that the family now has electric lights. In private with Abuela Margara, Mami weeps because of Papi's disloyalty.

Mami Gets a Job

Raymond is born on September 12, 1956. During hurricane Santa Clara on October 12, 1956, the family huddles with neighbors at the home of Doña Ana. The storm destroys nine avocado trees and six mango trees. Papi and Uncle Cándido repair and remodel the house. To earn money, Mami takes a job at a factory in Toa Baja. Gloria tends the children. Negi disobeys by entering Lalo's forbidden finca (farm) and gathering grapefruits. After Gloria elopes, Mami must stay home for weeks. She advances from thread cutter to a sewing machine. Doña Lola's son Tato is curious about Negi's genitals. He grabs for her; she kicks him in the groin. Mami punishes her. When Negi is ten, she learns about menstruation and conception from Gloria. Local people snub Mami because she has a job in a lingerie factory. While Mami works, Negi fails to control her younger siblings. She envies her cousin Jenny, who is a señorita. After Jenny gets a bicycle, she takes Delsa and Raymond for a ride. Raymond's toes catch in the chain. Neighbors take him to the emergency room in Bayamón. Mami quits work to tend him. The

injury creates distance between Papi and Mami as she searches for a cure. The family moves to Santurce to Doña Andrea's house.

El Mangle

To Negi, the barrio of El Mangle seems like a lagoon of sewage. Doña Andrea lives at a floating house at the end of a pier. Negi fears the toilet, a hole in the floor that empties into the stinking water below. At school, Señora Leona harasses Negi, who hasn't learned fractions. Negi retreats into imagination. Doña Cony asks Negi's assistance in closing the eyes of Cony's dead baby boy. The experience leaves the feel of death on Negi's fingers. The teacher continues to ridicule Negi for her rural upbringing. Papi rescues Negi from the classroom.

Letters from New York

Papi reunites with Mami and moves the family to Santurce to an apartment behind a bar. The place is noisy, but offers running water and electricity. Because Raymond's foot is still raw a year after the accident, doctors suggest amputation. Mami searches for a specialist. Papi leaves for days at a time. To buy food, Mami cooks for the landlord, takes in ironing, and cleans houses. Negi loves learning to iron. In late December, Mami butchers the landlord's pig and roasts it for a Christmas Eve feast.

While Mami takes Raymond to New York for treatment, Negi visits Tío Lalo and his wife Angelina and their daughters, Gladys and Angie. Lalo and Angelina are evangelicals. Lalo forces Negi to peel hot potatoes for his store. She fears that Mami will not return. Mami extends her two-week stay by five days. The family moves once more.

Casi Señorita (nearly a young lady)

A snoopy neighbor sees Negi stealing nickels from the baby's piggy bank and urges Mami to take the family to Sunday school. The children go to Iglesia San Juan Bautista de Paz y Misericordia—the Church of St. John the Baptist of Peace and Mercy, which assembles at a nearby home. The minister, Don Joaquín, leads the adults in a rapturous evangelical service. Papi sends Negi to study piano with Don Luis, the school principal. For payment, Papi does carpentry work on Don Luis's porch.

The teacher asks Negi to come at a different time to escape Papi's hammering. When Don Luis stares

down Negi's dress, she runs for home. Mami goes to Don Luis's office the next day to protest. On Mami's next trip to New York, Generosa takes care of the children. She talks dirty, feeds the children oatmeal at every meal, and allows them to play where they wish. Papi moves them back to Tío Lalo's house. Negi considers running away.

Dreams of a Better Life

Mami is furious that Papi moves the family to Macún without telling her. She seems changed by New York and more beautiful. They live at Sabana Grande near a golf course and watch cartoons on television with neighbors. Papi retreats to a tool shed to read prophecy and Rosicrucian literature, drink, and smoke. Negi gets her own room. Papi and Mami buy a snack truck to sell lunch to construction workers. After the business fails, Papi returns to carpentry.

Negi listens to radio romances. Mami demands marriage after 14 years as a common-law wife. In seventh grade, Johannes Vélez takes an interest in Negi. Mami invites him for a visit, but Negi chooses to be rude by ridiculing his name. She walks outdoors with him and falls into the creek. Negi flirts with a neighborhood male until Mami intervenes. The arguments at home worsen. Negi complains that life isn't fair. Papi is proud to have a teenage daughter. Because Papi refuses marriage, Mami plans to move to New York. In August, Mami leaves with Edna, Raymond, and Negi.

Angels on the Ceiling

After the flight to New York, the family lives in Brooklyn with Tata. Mami and the three children share a two-room apartment upstairs from Tata. Negi watches Mami bargain at la marketa. The building is near Jewish, Italian, and Morenos (black) residents in Williamsburg. Negi converses well in English and bargains with the school principal to allow her to remain in eighth grade. He gives her until Christmas to prove she can keep up.

Mami moves to a four-room flat in the projects opposite Bushwick Avenue and facing Varet Street. On October 7, 1961, the other four children join Mami. Negi becomes a señorita. While Mami works in Manhattan, her grandmother drinks beer or wine. On cold days, the children cluster at the oven door to keep warm and to listen to Negi's storytelling. Schools close on the first snowy day.

During midterm exams, Negi scores high in English, history, and social studies. Mami falls in love with Francisco. That summer Negi watches a flasher who parks his truck outside her window.

You Don't Want to Know

While Mami blossoms with her eighth pregnancy, Francisco is diagnosed with cancer. In March, Franky is born. Francisco returns home from the hospital and dies of cancer. Mami goes into a year's mourning. Papi seems glad to be rid of his seven children. Mami works hard so her family can have professions. Tata drinks with Chico and Don Julio. Chico pinches Negi's breast.

Negi interprets for Mami at the welfare office. When Mami threatens her for arriving late from school, Negi grasps her mother's wrists to stop her from striking. Mami never hits Negi again. Don Julio is mugged at the subway station. Mami realizes that she can't depend on anyone to defend her family.

A Shot at It

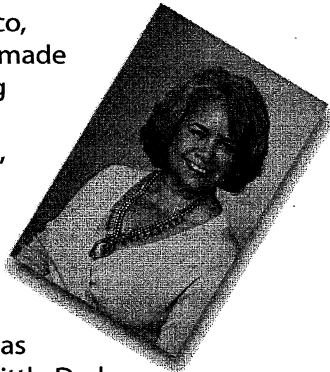
After a move to Ellery Street, Negi attends ninth grade at P.S. 33. She discusses with Yolanda the possibility of going to college. Negi tells the principal, Mr. Barone, that she wants to be an actress. He suggests an audition at the performing arts school. Negi hates living in the city. She performs a speech from *The Silver Cord* (1926) and pantomimes trimming a Christmas tree with Bonnie, another auditioner. Negi believes she has failed.

Epilogue: One of These Days

In 1976, Negi lives in Boston and studies at Harvard University. She is mentored by the woman who conducted the audition. The woman recalls how Negi cried that she couldn't come to school the first day because she had to translate for Mami at the welfare office. Negi is proud of graduating from the performing arts school, class of '66.

Author Sketch

A native of Santurce, a rural barrio in Tao Baja, Puerto Rico, Esmeralda Santiago has made a strong showing among Latina feminist authors. She was born on May 17, 1948, the eldest of the seven children of a common-law marriage. The family lived in a dirt-floored hut in Macún. Her nickname was Negi, short for Negrita (Little Dark One). Of her childhood, she remarked, "I was a very observant child. My mother always talked about my big eyes looking." After immigrating from Santurce to Brooklyn, New York, at age 13, she studied *Archie* comics, which taught her American slang, and got a library card to read serious works. She remarked, "I think the library is the only truly democratic institution in the United States. I am thankful for that freedom to explore my interest and curiosity, and I could never repay the librarians that guided me there and provided me those worlds."



The Santiago family moved some 20 times to accommodate the author's maternal grandmother, mother, stepfather, and four more siblings. With a diploma from the prestigious Performing Arts High School and honors in dance and drama, she worked as an actress in two Broadway musicals and as a film extra in *Up the Down Staircase* while studying at a community college. On full scholarship, she enhanced her skills as a storyteller by completing a film production degree from Harvard University in 1976 and by earning an MFA from Sarah Lawrence College. She also holds honorary degrees from Pace and Trinity universities.

Santiago writes opinion pieces for newspapers and has published in the *Boston Globe*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Good Housekeeping*, *House & Garden*, *Latina*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Metropolitan Home*, *New York Times*, *Ploughshares*, *Radcliffe Quarterly*, and *Vista*. She has also hosted NPR's *All Things Considered* and *Morning Edition* and addressed the National Council of Teachers of English, International Reading Association, and the Smithsonian Institution. Santiago and director

Frank Cantor, her husband, share a Manhattan home with their daughter Ila and son Lucas. The couple produces documentary and educational films at Cantomedia, for which Santiago does research, writes proposals, and scripts narrations. She joined Joie Davidow in co-editing *Las Christmas: Favorite Latino Authors Share Their Holiday Memories* and *Las Mamis: Favorite Latino Authors Remember Their Mothers*. Santiago is a public library advocate, chair of the Campaign for America's Libraries, and an education committee-woman of the Burns Film Center. She founded social programs for teens and for battered women and their children in a Quincy, Massachusetts, shelter.

Critic's Corner

Santiago's passion emerges in her fervor for the humanities. She stated, "I passionately feel that the soul of a people is carried in its arts. If we don't have artists, we lose ourselves, we lose humanity." Candor about history, culture, and feminism helps her to document the multiple cultural experiences of Puerto Ricans. Of the revelations about her family's faults, she remarked, "I was terrified when they were first released. I tried to be very honest, and I was worried that my family would be offended or upset. When you've been a welfare kid, you don't talk about it comfortably, and I was worried about saying that my grandmother was an alcoholic. But they all thanked me for writing the book. They told me they were happy that their children would understand those stories that we all tell our children about a certain way we grew up. Both of my parents were positive about the books. My father's attitude was, 'I'm the villain in this book, but it's important that our story be told.'"

Of her purpose in writing about coming-of-age challenges, Santiago sides with females: "It's important to me that there never be another little girl like Esmeralda Santiago feeling completely alone and left out of this culture." For vignettes of young womanhood in *America's Dream*, Santiago earned recognition from Literary Guild. For *Almost a Woman*, the sequel to *When I Was Puerto Rican*, she received the American Library Association Alex Award and the 2004 selection as the One Book for Greater Hartford. On September 14, 2002, the work appeared as a teleplay broadcast by the Exxon Mobil Masterpiece Theater on PBS. It shared billing

with the writings of James Agee, Willa Cather, Henry James, Eudora Welty, and Tennessee Williams. The film won a Premio Sol for Best Picture at the Houston Film Festival, an Imagen Award for Best Picture, and a George Peabody Award for Excellence in Broadcasting.

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- Almost a Woman* (screenplay), 1999
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- A Baby Doll Like Jenny's*, 2004

Timeline of Events

November 19,

1493 Christopher Columbus discovers Puerto Rico, which becomes a Spanish colony.

1898 The United States seizes Puerto Rico.

1926 Sidney Howard writes *The Silver Cord*.

1931 Mami is born.

1939 Pope Pius XII begins a 19-year rule.

ca. 1946 Tata moves to Brooklyn.

1947 Papi begins living with Mami in a common-law marriage.

1948 Luis Muñoz Marín is elected governor of Puerto Rico.

May 17,

1948 Esmeralda “Negi” is born in Santurce, Puerto Rico.

1951 The family moves to a dirt-floor hut in Macún.

1952 Negi receives sex education from Gloria.

1953 Dwight Eisenhower is elected president of the United States.

September 12,

1956 Raymond is born.

October 12,

1956 Hurricane Santa Clara strikes Puerto Rico.

November

1960 John Kennedy is elected President of the United States.

spring 1961 Negi visits Gladys and Angie while Mami takes Raymond to a doctor in New York.

August Mami takes Edna, Raymond, and Negi to New York.

shortly Papi marries and scatters his family among relatives.

September Negi enters eighth grade with poor learners.

October 7 Delsa, Norma, Héctor, and Alicia join the family in Brooklyn.

midterm Negi scores well on school tests.

winter 1962 Francisco moves in with Mami.

March

1963 Mami gives birth to Franky.

later Francisco dies of cancer.

Jan. 1964 Negi successfully auditions for admission to the school of performing arts.

1966 Negi graduates from high school.

1969 Esmeralda Santiago moves to Florida. Mami returns to Macún.

1976 Santiago graduates from Harvard University.

Related Reading

Isabel Allende, *Daughter of Fortune*

Julia Alvarez, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accent*

T. Coraghessan Boyle, *The Tortilla Curtain*

Willa Cather, *My Antonia*

Carmen Deedy, *Growing Up Cuban*

Isak Dinesen, *Babette's Feast*

Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*

Gish Jen, *Typical American*

Ruth Praver Jhabvala, *Heat and Dust*

Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy*

Betty Mahmoody, *Not Without My Daughter*

Ruthann Lum McCunn, *Thousand Pieces of Gold*,

Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Cathy Song, *The Picture Bride*

Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, *The Bonesetter's*

Daughter, and *The Kitchen God's Wife*

John Van Druten, *I Remember Mama*

Yoko Kawashima Watkins, *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Esmeralda Santiago's fiction, present the following terms and applications:

anti-hero a protagonist or central figure who lacks the usual heroic qualities of an admirable person or leader, particularly skill, grace, honesty, courage, and truth. The memoir stresses ignoble traits in Negi—defiance of her parents, disobedience toward Mami, negligence with the younger children, and flirtation with a flasher and an anonymous neighbor. The struggles of growing up under unpleasant home circumstances brings out these traits as coping mechanisms for a child who tries to understand the flaws in adult male-female relationships.

memoir a short recollection of personal observations and experiences composed as autobiography, biography, or historical fiction. Esmeralda Santiago reflects on her childhood and early teens from the perspective of a new life and literary career in the United States. By examining the insecurity of the eldest child of a shaky common-law marriage, the author explains some of the behaviors and judgments that precede Negi's formation of an adult persona.

sociological novel reform literature that uses character and action to delineate a social problem. *When I Was Puerto Rican* particularizes infidelity and common-law relationships as unstable grounds for devoted family life. Papi's rationalizations and macho behaviors are poor excuses for his failure to support and provide for his family. Even worse is his near abandonment of Monín and her seven children in favor of a legal wife.

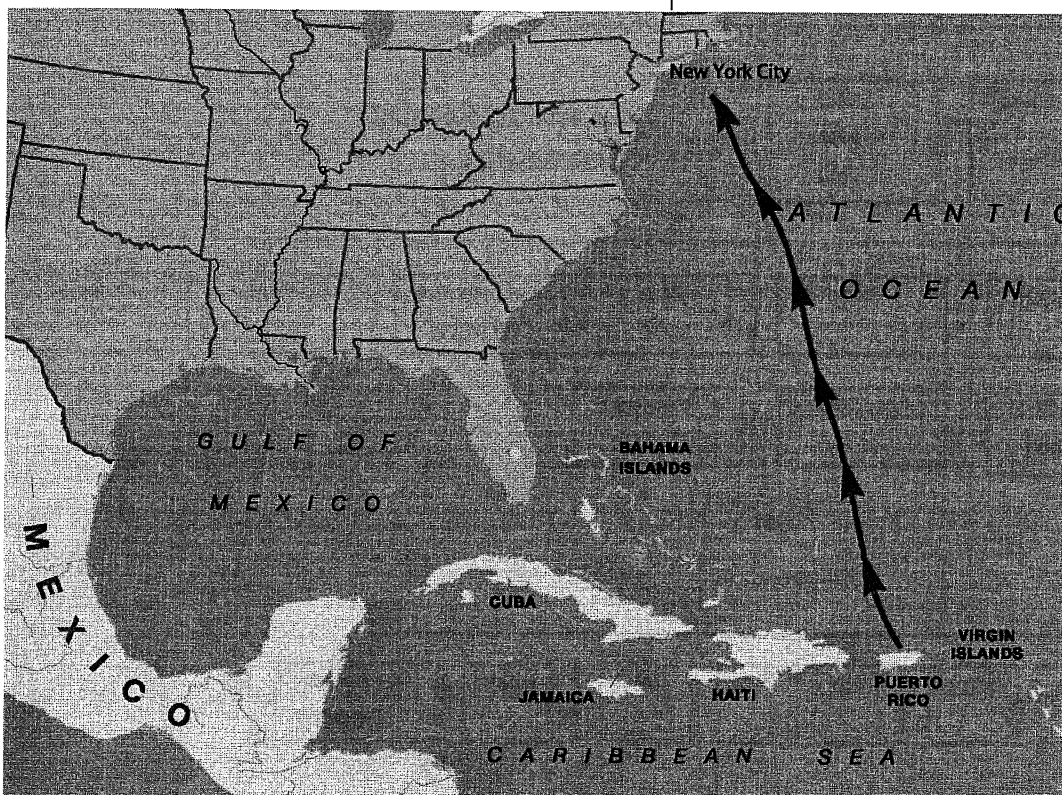
The Importance of Setting

The milieu of Esmeralda Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican* captures a range of sense images and memories collected over a decade. Opening on a yearning for ripe guavas, Negi thinks back to life in Macún in a dirt-floor hut on stilts, which Papi improves by installing a floor. After Negi's enrollment in elementary school, she fights in the schoolyard as an expression of fervor and aggression. On the fourth day of school, when Mami moves the family to the suburb of Santurce outside San Juan, the family lives in a barrio with Grandmother Tata. Negi acclimates to a new school that is more urban and a faculty that is less patient with a jíbara (hick).

On the family's return to Macún, Negi is happy in a familiar outback setting. Her growing base of experience includes Don Berto's funeral and a frolic in the first rain of May. There is brief mention of English lessons in Miss Jiménez's class and free meals, toothbrushes, and groceries from the Free Associated State. Mami and her children learn about nutrition and hygiene at the community center and receive unfamiliar foods suited to American tables. Another introduction to the outside world is a box of used clothing from Mami's mother in New York. On a visit to Abuela in Santurce, Negi experiences a quiet, orderly city residence, where she learns to crochet, attends mass, and observes Abuelo selling oranges from a cart at Calle San Cristóbal in Old San Juan.

During hurricane Santa Clara, the family huddles with neighbors and passes the time in games, card playing, and food until the storm passes. Negi's world changes with the destruction of homes, fences, and outbuildings and the ruin of avocado and mango trees. While Papi and Uncle Cándido repair and remodel the house, the setting alters more drastically as Mami leaves daily to sew lingerie at a factory in Toa Baja. Freedom under Gloria, the babysitter, allows Negi to roam a neighbor's finca (farm) to gather grapefruits and to satisfy sexual curiosity with Tato in a secluded part of the yard. The injury to Raymond's toes during a bicycle ride seals the family's future by forcing Mami to leave the country in search of a cure in Santurce.

Town life dismays Negi. She hates the odor of sewage at Doña Andrea's house at the end of a pier and fears the toilet, a hole in the floor that empties into the polluted water below. At



school, Senora Leona humiliates Negi for not understanding and for being a jíbara (hick). After Papi resettles the family at an apartment behind a Santurce bar, Negi's life is filled with noise and the absence of Mami, who cooks for the landlord, takes in ironing, and cleans houses. The abandonment of the countryside reaches completion after Mami takes Raymond to New York for treatment. Brief relocations to Sabana Grande near a golf course precedes Negi's immigration to New York, where she copes in two languages with apartment life, bargaining at la marketa, demanding an eighth-grade class at school, visiting a hospital ward, and telling stories during cold winters. In retrospect from life in Boston at Harvard University, Negi is aware of the long distance she has come from Puerto Rico.

Cross-Curricular Sources

For more information about Esmeralda Santiago, Puerto Rico, immigration, colonialism, bilingualism, common-law marriage, and other subjects and issues deriving from the memoir, consult these sources:

Articles

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- Aliens in America*, Sandra Tsing Loh
- Growing Up Cuban*, Carmen Deedy

Books

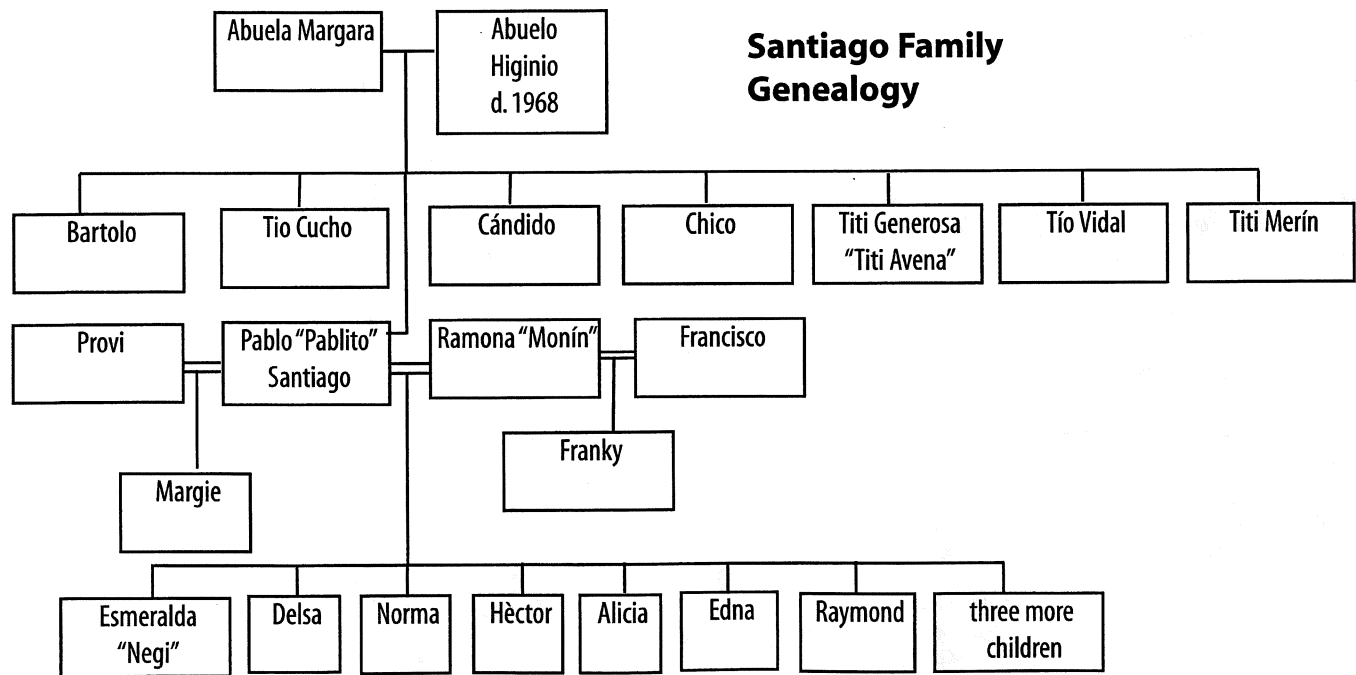
- Babette's Feast*, Isak Dinesen
- Bowman's Store*, Joseph Bruchac
- The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini
- My Antonia*, Willa Cather
- Not Without My Daughter*, Betty Mahmoody

Filmstrip

- Self-Fulfillment*, Guidance Associates

Internet

- Central America and the Caribbean: Puerto Rico
<http://www.nationmaster.com/country/rq>



Immigration

<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/immig/cuban3.html>

Legend

The Legend of the Hummingbird: A Tale from Puerto Rico

Map

Puerto Rico

http://www.lonelyplanet.com/mapshells/caribbean/puerto_rico/puerto_rico.htm

Music

"La Borinqueña,"

<http://home.planet.nl/~jschoone/pr.html>

Myth

The Golden Flower: A Taino Myth from Puerto Rico

Poems

"The Picture Bride," Cathy Song

Reference Books

Puerto Rico Mio: Four Decades of Change

The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move

The Puerto Ricans: A Documentary History

Starting Sexual Relationships: Marriage and Living Together

Short Story

"Fish Cheeks," Amy Tan

Stories from Puerto Rico, Robert L. Muckley

Slides

Characters in Crisis, Center for Humanities

An Inquiry into the Nature of Man: His Inhumanity and His Humanity, Center for the Humanities

No Man Is an Island, Center for the Humanities

Video

Heat and Dust

I Remember Mama

The Joy Luck Club

Not Without My Daughter

Out of Africa

Sarah, Plain and Tall

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in *When I Was Puerto Rican* should include these aspects:

Themes

- obedience
- innocence
- arguments
- upheaval
- relocation
- separation
- loss
- urbanism
- identity
- opportunity

Motifs

- growing up in a rural family
- understanding adultery
- loving and leaving
- comprehending betrayal
- coping with emotional trauma

General Objectives

1. To understand the impact of infidelity on a family
2. To account for the success of an immigrant student
3. To interpret shifts in a common-law marriage
4. To identify sexual immorality
5. To discuss the themes of courage and new beginnings
6. To explain the harm of family separation
7. To analyze school relationships
8. To describe attitudes toward womanhood
9. To account for frequent pregnancy in a single mother
10. To analyze the roles of neighbor women.

Specific Objectives

1. To explain why politicians distribute free breakfasts and groceries
2. To analyze Mami's reactions to Francisco's death and Papi's marriage
3. To summarize the centrality of Tata, Gloria, and Abuela
4. To account for changes in Mami after she returns from New York
5. To describe the lengthy treatment of a bicycle injury
6. To predict how Negi's relationship with Mami will continue to develop

7. To summarize incidents that introduce Negi to human sexuality
8. To discuss the roles of teachers, social workers, and ministers
9. To describe the roles of Yolanda, Bonnie, Tato, Jenny, Gladys, Juanita, and Angie
10. To list the steps that precede the audition for the Performing Arts High School

Meaning Study

Below are significant words, phrases, or sentences from the memoir. Explain each in context. Chapter names and page numbers pinpoint each entry so that you can re-read the passage in which it appears.

1. Whenever Mami was fed up with Macún, or with Papi, she ran away to Santurce, a suburb of San Juan, which, by the early fifties, had become as much a metropolis as the capital, though with little of its cachet. (Someone Is Coming to Take Your Lap, 37).
(Santurce is the opposite of Macún—urban, commercial, noisy, and touristy. Because of the blocks lined with boutiques, hotels, casinos, a university, and restaurants, the area offers Mami numerous job possibilities, but limits Negi's pleasure in nature.)
2. What a jíbara ... What a jíbara ... What a jíbara. (Someone Is Coming to Take Your Lap, 39)
(In the citified glare of Santurce, Negi suffers displacement and ridicule for her rural accent and ignorance. She denigrates herself for "home-cut hair, the too large gestures and too loud voice, the feet unaccustomed to shoes.")
3. Papi was to lead the novenas for Don Berto. (Someone Is Coming to Take Your Lap, 53).
(Papi displays more religiosity than Mami, who doesn't take the children to church. Papi leads novenas, a series of prayers conducted over a nine-day period that concentrate on one subject, in this case, the departure of Don Berto's soul.)
4. It's the first rain in May. It's good luck to get wet by the first May rain. (Someone Is Coming to Take Your Lap, 59)

(In contrast to Papi, Mami clings to countrified customs and superstitions, especially about the arrival of spring. In peasant cultures, running barefoot in the first May rain is considered propitious, especially to the head. The water is the choice of priests for holy water, purification rites, and spiritual wholeness. It supposedly wards off disease, headaches, lice, baldness, bad luck, and nightmares.)

5. There were no fathers. Most of them worked seven days a week, and anyway, children and food were woman's work. (The American Invasion of Macún, 64)
(In early childhood, Negi begins learning the realm of woman's work along with its responsibilities. The relegation of food and child care to women helps unfaithful men like Papi to enjoy freedom from domesticity and opportunities for adulterous relationships and second families.)
6. Everyone knows it's Don Luis Muñoz Marín. (The American Invasion of Macún, 71)
(Negi is pleased to retort to Ignacio the name of the island's governor, who remained in office from 1948 to 1964. His administration established the island as a commonwealth and relieved poverty through Operation Bootstraps, a jobs program derived from American investment in island industry.)
7. At the same time she taught us the Puerto Rican national anthem, which said Borinquén was the daughter of the ocean and the sun. (The American invasion of Macún, p. 77)
(The island's anthem, "La Borinqueña" (The Air), is a melancholy habañera. It was the composition of Francisco Ramirez or Félix Astol Artés with lyrics by Manuel Fernandez-Juncos. It lauds the beauty of the land as florid and fragrant beneath a cloudless sky.)
8. Papi, what's a jamona? (Why Women Remain Jamona, p. 89)
(The patriarchal attitude of male Puerto Ricans resounds in the double standard, which allows men the sexual freedom of bachelors while condemning women to a life of domestic drudgery and child-bearing. For those women who choose not to marry, men reserve a sneering ridicule and lob insults at their man-free lifestyle.)

9. Her dresser held a brush and comb, an altar to the Virgin and Child, a rosary, a Bible, candles, a missal, a small bottle filled with holy water, a picture of Papa Pío the Pope, and cards on which were printed prayers to saints with names like San Francisco, Santa Ana, Santa Bárbara, and San José. (Why Women Remain Jamona, 94)
(Pope Pius XII entered his papal reign in 1939 and remained on the Vatican throne until his death in 1958.)
10. Once, while he was in the latrine, I sneaked into his spice-scented hideaway and rifled through a stack of Rosicrucian literature and a book by Nostradamus. (Dreams of a Better Life, 191).
(Papi spends his private time in the tool shed reading about the prophecies of Nostradamus, a French astrologer and physician who began composing visions in 1547. He published them as Centuries (1555), which refers to the collection of prognostications by hundreds. Rosicrucians are a brotherhood of wise men who study the religious secrets of Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, and Syria.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers with quotations from the memoir.

Motivation

1. What causes dissension in Negi's family?
(Negi and her siblings grow up in a tense, highly volatile situation that stems from Mami's discontent with her common-law marriage to Papi. Mami struggles to keep house in a dirt-floor hut that lacks electricity and running water. Papi claims to do his best for his wife and seven children while maintaining a separate family in San Juan. The double standard allows males like Papi to violate marital fidelity while requiring that their wives and children to obey and serve him.

After Mami's first experience in Brooklyn, she returns to Puerto Rico more liberated from

patriarchy. To assure Héctor's cure from the bicycle accident and to improve the lives of the other six children, Mami leaves Papi and establishes a residence with Tata in New York. The final break frees Papi to abandon his remaining children among relatives and to marry. Mami hates him for his mistreatment, but she insists that her children respect their father.)

Setting

2. Describe the centro communal.
(During an election year, politicians provide rural Puerto Ricans with improvements to health and nutrition. At the centro communal, Negi and her mother receive free groceries and toothbrushes. The children eat a free breakfast six days a week by lining up at the distribution center for servings of powdered eggs, sausage, bread and margarine, and watery orange juice. An alternate meal requires the stirring of peanut butter into powdered milk. American social workers provide training in nutrition, which they base on an American-style food chart. Additional instruction illustrates proper tooth brushing and warns of the dangers of intestinal parasites and head lice.)

Character Development

3. How does Mami change over time?
(Mami endures fourteen years of dislocation and instability during her common-law marriage to Papi. She frets at the dirt-floored hut in Macún and tolerates frequent moves to Santurce. She compensates for limited income for her seven children by getting a job in a lingerie factory and by taking in ironing from a Santurce laundry, cleaning houses, and selling food to a bar and from a lunch wagon that serves construction workers.

After ferrying Héctor to Brooklyn for treatment of his infected foot, Mami returns a changed woman. She is more self-assured in her femininity and more assertive of Papi's obligation to marry her and to provide for the children. After their relationship breaks down irrevocably, he withdraws to solitude in the tool shed. Mami gives up on Papi and transports the children to Tata's residence in New York. Gradually, Mami upgrades their accommodations. When she experiences factory layoffs, she demands response from welfare workers. She ignores

ridicule and shaming for her relationship with Francisco and displays real grief for him during a yearlong mourning period.)

Historical Milieu

4. How does the novel depict immigrant life in Brooklyn?
(When Mami's family establishes a new home in Brooklyn in the early 1960s, the racial climate is tense with gangs, turf wars, and muggings in the subway stations. Negi learns the caste system at school, where blacks, Italians, Jews, and Puerto Ricans establish their own styles and behaviors. Among Puerto Ricans, Negi belongs to those born in Puerto Rico and suffers the ostracism reserved for rural islanders who speak with a country accent. During the administration of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, children like Negi encounter increased opportunities for education. She makes the most of an offer for college training by auditioning for enrollment at the city's prestigious Performing Arts High School.)

Theme

5. Why is obedience a controlling theme?
(Both Mami and Papi demand obedience from their children, who are not allowed to sass adults or to leave the property without permission. One reason for serious strictures on child behavior is the expectation that society places on parents to control their offspring. Another aspect of obedience training is the number of dangerous situations that threaten the seven children. Mami requires her brood to listen to their babysitters and to obey Negi, who is the eldest. While the family lives at Doña Andrea's house on the pier, Mami instructs Negi on the use of an indoor toilet and demands that she come straight home from school. As Negi approaches young womanhood, she learns from Mami the rules of good manners and begins exercising autonomy from strict control. The shift attests to Negi's approaching adulthood.)

Interpretation

6. Why do feminists claim *When I Was Puerto Rican*?
(Negi's memoir is a testimonial to her emerging womanhood. A parallel to the girl's development of individuality is Mami's flight from

patriarchy and her demand that Papi respect her and the family by supporting them and by marrying Mami. The breakdown in the common-law marriage presses Mami to extreme behaviors, beginning with her improvement of her appearance and her search for a job in a lingerie factory. After she seeks medical care for Héctor in America, she witnesses in New York a more equitable arrangement for women. The final break with Papi precedes Mami's joy in a relationship with Francisco, a man in his 20s. By shouldering full responsibility for her first family and for Francisco's son Franky, Mami rids herself of the Puerto Rican double standard and prides herself in supporting her family from the proceeds of factory work.)

Conflict

7. How does conflict invigorate the narrative?
(Negi's girlhood is a constant seesawing from pleasures in nature and school and to fears of family altercations and the family's uprooting to new residences. The telltale signs of a blowup begin with Papi's unexplained absences and Mami's anger at his disloyalty. After each relocation, Negi must acclimate to a new home, friends, and school. By the time that Mami's family settles in Brooklyn, Negi is familiar with conflict and resettlement. Her command of language emerges in storytelling sessions in front of the hot oven in winter. She applies her skill at English to helping the family through new conflicts with welfare agencies. She deftly eludes the advances of Chico and successfully auditions for a place at the performing arts high school.)

Action

8. How does Negi compensate for a lack of religious training?
(Negi's curiosity about religion receives satisfaction from significant moments in the action. After Cony's infant son dies with eyes open, Negi agrees to aid the mother by closing the eyes during the infant's wake. A second encounter with death introduces Negi to a new side of her father, who leads the service for Don Berto, Juanita Marín's grandfather. Papi holds novenas for the old man and helps Negi cope with loss. Additional encounters with religion introduce Negi to variant belief systems. At Abuela's home in Santurce, Negi learns the Lord's Prayer

and how to cross herself. She fasts before services and attends mass. While residing with Don Lalo and Angelina, Negi encounters a selfish couple who transform their daily behavior during ecstatic worship under the leadership of evangelical minister Don Joaquín.)

Author Purpose

9. Why does the memoir appeal to readers? (Esmeralda Santiago carefully balances Negi's idiosyncrasies with universal traits that readers can identify with. In the turmoil of daily life with squabbling parents, Negi develops a strong constitution that serves her well during uncertainties, especially Papi's betrayals and Mami's trips to New York. Negi's confusion about behavioral expectations as she approaches womanhood causes her to question the double standard that cages Mami in a no-win domestic situation. Negi's developing personality reveals strengths of character, particularly determination and willingness to work, both derived from her mother. The successful audition of a scene from *The Silver Cord* illustrates that Negi can learn from her childhood experiences and can rise above the instability of her life with Mami and Papi.)

Structure

10. Why does the memoir require a framework? (Esmeralda Santiago attempts an explanation of whom she once was and how she changed after leaving Puerto Rico to live in New York City. She muses over the difference between the two milieus by comparing a ripe mango to the bittersweet flavor of American apples and pears. By jumping a decade in the epilogue, she reveals the education of a future writer. Far from her Puerto Rican roots, she copes with American life while retaining nostalgia for the rural growing-up years in Macún. Her respect for an American mentor and the opportunity for a quality education in Boston at Harvard University suggest that the post-adolescent years smoothed over the rough edges of a difficult domestic life.)

How Language Works

Esmeralda Santiago invites readers to experience her life story by stressing sense impressions:

1. Visits with Don Berto introduce Negi to old age: "His skin was so black and wrinkled that it seemed to absorb light into its crevices, to be let out again in the most glorious smile I'd ever seen on anyone with no teeth. I was fascinated by his pink gums, the tongue spotted with white, the lips almost the same color as the rest of his skin."
2. Mami's home health care forces Negi to swallow a vermifuge: "The purgante was her own concoction, a mixture of cod-liver oil and mugwort, milk of magnesia, and green papaya juice, sweetened to disguise the fishy, bitter, chalky taste."
3. Negi acts out scenarios she reads in romance novels: "I nipped [the gardenia], brought it to my face, and buried myself in its fragrance. He rose and looked across to where I stood. I felt dangerous, bold, older by years, inspired by all the Marianas and Sofías whose emotional ups and downs had fed my romantic fantasies."
4. While studying the racial idiosyncrasies of classmates, Negi ponders human individuality: "I was not accepted by the Brooklyn Puerto Ricans, who held the secret of coolness. They walked the halls between the Italians and the Morenos, neither one nor the other, but looking and acting like a combination of both."
5. Negi's ability to release her mind through imagination wins her a place at a prestigious school. At the audition in the performing arts, she acts out a Christmas scene: "[Bonnie] pretended to hand me a very delicate ball, and just before I took it, she made like it fell to the ground and shattered. I was petrified that Mami would come in and yell at us for breaking her favorite decoration."

Across the Curriculum

Composition

1. Write a paragraph summarizing the importance of menarche to Negi and her family. Why does the family celebrate the arrival of womanhood?
2. Compose an extended definition of oral tradition to explain how Negi helps the family endure Brooklyn's cold winters.
3. Describe ways in which Papi shows his love for Negi. Contrast with a separate survey of the ways that Mami displays affection and admiration of her eldest daughter.
4. Write a paragraph that contrasts life in two of the places in which Negi lives. Consider the dirt-floored hut in Macún, a two-room Brooklyn apartment, at Abuela's house in Santurce, at the residence of Tío Lalo and Tía Angelina, and in a house at the end of a pier.

Religion and Morals

1. Make a wall chart contrasting the elements of Catholic mass with those of evangelical worship.
2. Compose a speech explaining why a common-law marriage shames and enrages Mami.
3. Discuss the irony of Mami's fear of criminals on New York streets and in subway stations while Negi wards off the sexual advances of her uncle Chico in Tata's apartment.

Drama

1. Draw stage settings for a dramatization of smiling at a truck driver from the apartment window, auditioning with a segment from *The Silver Cord*, removing Raymond's foot from a bicycle chain, riding the publico to Santurce with Papi, drinking peanut butter stirred into powdered milk, solving a math problem at the blackboard, learning to use Andrea's toilet over the lagoon, crocheting with Abuela Margara, peeling an orange in one long curl, roasting a Christmas pig behind a bar, translating for Spanish-speaking women at the welfare office, helping Papi

place cinder blocks, and visiting Francisco in the hospital ward. Supply sketches of costumes and props, such as a johnny (hospital gown), glass, spoon, bus, script, orange, welfare forms, cinder blocks, tools, truck, crochet hook, yarn, and bicycle.

2. Create a storyboard account of Negi's first term in a Brooklyn school. Stress her performance among the poor learners of 8-23.
3. Summarize the action of Sidney Coe Howard's three-act drama *The Silver Cord* (1926), a play about possessive motherhood that was filmed in 1933, starring Joel McCrae and Irene Dunne. Discuss why the play mirrors aspects of Mami's relationship with Negi.

Education

1. Role-play the training of Puerto Rican immigrants in basic education. Include reading, writing, English conversation, math, science, and discussion of domestic needs, transportation, citizenship, finances, welfare, health care, and current events.
2. Propose curriculum for a class to teach Mami about cutting threads and sewing lingerie in an American factory. Include details about immigration papers, seeking a job, dealing with el bosso, securing a Social Security number, providing identification for check cashing, and mailing money home to the three children she left in Puerto Rico.
3. Compile a parallel list of advantages and disadvantages to attending a bilingual school in Puerto Rico. Include speaking in English and Spanish in class and among friends. Explain why some children blend the languages informally into Spanglish.

Speech

1. Brainstorm ways of preparing Negi for an audition for the Performing Arts High School. Suggest ways to recite lines from *The Silver Cord* that reveal Negi's maturity, passion, and imagination. Discuss why pantomiming the decoration of a Christmas tree reveals her inner qualities.

2. Organize a discussion of common-law marriage. Answer these questions: What social order makes Puerto Rican males freer than females? How does Mami change after she travels to Brooklyn? Why is she not surprised that Papi marries so quickly and that he virtually abandons his children to relatives?
3. Compose a verbal tour of significant places in Puerto Rico and in New York City, including Old San Juan, Santurce, Macún, Toa Baja, Sabana Grande, Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and Manhattan. Express the importance of public transportation to working-class people like Mami, Papi, Chico, Francisco, Don Julio, and Tata. Contrast entertainments, shopping, and educational opportunities in both countries.
4. Outline a speech describing the complications of puberty brought on by moving to a new land and by functioning in a new language. Include Negi's relationships with blacks, Italians, Jews, and American-born Puerto Ricans.

Cinema

1. View films about immigrant difficulties, such as *The Joy Luck Club*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Lord Jim*, *Farewell to Manzanar*, *The Piano*, *The Age of Innocence*, *My Antonia*, *Babette's Feast*, *The Buccaneers*, *Daughters of the Dust*, *Enslavement: The True Story of Fanny Kemble*, *Not Without My Daughter*, *The Good Earth*, *Heat and Dust*, *Out of Africa*, *I Remember Mama*, and *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. Compare the movies' settings, themes, and dialogue to those of *When I Was Puerto Rican*. Comment on pictorial scenes that illustrate Negi's defiant spirit, including her fight with Tato and her rejection of powdered milk and peanut butter.

Science and Health

1. Compose a lecture on treatment of head lice and intestinal parasites and on immunization for tuberculosis and polio. Explain why these diseases flourish among poor people.
2. List first aid, treatment, and complications for Raymond's foot injury in the bicycle chain. Account for the suggestion of amputation as the best way to end Raymond's suffering.

3. Discuss immediate needs of parturient women attended by neighbors and village curanderas. Project long-term care for Mami after she bears eleven children and rears them on her own while working in a lingerie factory and living off welfare.

Geography and Culture

1. Create a mural or web site on Puerto Rico. Note the advantages of being born in the Caribbean in a U. S. territory. Contrast native-born children like Negi and her siblings with American-born Puerto Ricans like Johannes Vélez.
2. Make a web site or bulletin board characterizing threats to families living in dirt-floored huts in Macún. How do these threats contrast with those of living on a hut over a lagoon of raw sewage? being mugged in a New York subway? walking streets patrolled by gangs? being exploited by an uncle who owns a candy store?
3. Make an illustrated notebook of island touches in Puerto Rican dress, art, music, food, holidays, politics, education, worship, home decor, male-female relationships, holiday celebrations, and daily customs. Include Christmas decorations, Catholic mass, flirtatious men, free breakfasts and free groceries during elections, treatment of working women, home birthing, expectations for señoritas, and coming-of-age rituals.

Law

1. Read aloud the rights of women in common-law marriages and the children they bear. Conclude why Mami demands a formal wedding after living 14 years with Papi and bearing him seven children. Why does Papi consider himself dutiful in supporting his children and giving them his surname?
2. Make a chart of advice to Mami about living with Francisco in Brooklyn and bearing his child.
3. Set up a mock bureau to help non-English-speaking women like Mami confer with welfare agents. Explain why she carries a large purse crammed with her children's birth certificates.

Social Studies and Economics

1. Discuss with a small group family behaviors, disappointments, and expectations after serious parental squabbles and after abrupt changes of residence. Explain how Negi copes with frequent moves to new neighborhoods and new schools.
2. Report orally on the physical and psychological effects of lay-offs on Mami. Explain why welfare checks are a necessity for a single mother supporting seven children.
3. Divide the class into small groups to brainstorm ways to unify so disparate a family as Papi and Mami, their seven children, Provi and her daughter Margie, Francisco and Franky, Papi's new wife, and a network of American and Puerto Rican relatives. Explain why letter-writing is important to Papi, Mami, and Tata.
4. Compose an extended definition of social and emotional isolation. Explain why the term describes both Negi and Mami. Explain why the prospect of an audition before English-speaking people terrifies Negi.

Psychology

1. Describe aloud the effect of Papi's betrayal of his daughter by using her visit to Tata as an excuse for philandering.
2. List aspects of Mami's life that indicate a profound change of heart. Discuss how she shifts from common-law wife, rural mother, and factory worker to American single parent and paramour of a younger man. Comment on her lack of religiosity and her iron discipline of children she leaves each workday. Why does she have to depend on Negi? How does Negi's control of Mami's wrists alter their former mother-daughter relationship? How does grief for Francisco change Mami?
3. Using incidents from the book, comment on gradual emotional changes in Papi toward Mami and their seven children. Discuss how Mami copes with a final break with Papi and why she urges Negi to write to her father and to honor him.

4. Characterize the moral integrity and influence on Negi from relationships with Chico, Tata, Abuelo Higinio, Gloria, Doña Zena, Tato, Jenny, Andrea, Doña Lola, Don Julio, Angelina, Don Luis, and Tito Lalo.
5. Write an encyclopedia entry on sexual abuse of a minor. Add details that explain why Chico is guilty of a crime against Negi. Is the truck driver guilty of the same crime?

Mathematics and Computers

1. Using desktop publishing, make a web site or bulletin board that identifies these terms: latrine, reproving, immobile, puta, abuela, plantain, injunction, mentor, chutzpah, guavas, enticing, barrio, vacillated, brazenly, spik, sinvergüenza, turf, monologue, impeccably, la marketa, parsed, chiforobe, trifecta, provocatively, noncommittal, jíbaro, sequestered, enthralled, synchronization, morose, Nostradamus, Rosicrucian, convoluted, macho, Ponce, Old San Juan, nimbus, reconciliation, tarmac, hypocrisy, common-law wife, curandera, arroz con dulce, dispersing, ecstatic trance, convulsion, exuberance, reverberating, euphemism, ingratiated, impropriety, ingenuousness, Caribs, redemption, utilitarian, aptitude, audition, repentance, surreal, precocious, relinquish, sidled, negrito, amputate, and evangelical.
2. Based on your understanding of the memoir, lead a panel discussion of the effects of a hurricane, debt, displacement, low-paying jobs, thwarted ambition, illness, suspicion, immigration, pregnancy, childbirth, and an absent father on Negi's family. Support your opinions with facts from census reports, sociological surveys, and statistics obtained from almanacs and economic and employment surveys.

Language and Speech

1. Using a Spanish-English dictionary, translate all stanzas of "La Borinqueña." Explain why the anthem concludes with repetitions of "sea and sun."
2. Prepare a dialogue dramatizing Negi's value to her mother and other Spanish-speaking women as translator and go-between in negotiations with welfare agents. Indicate why some discussions escalate into violence.

3. Using history and data from a variety of sources, discuss the influence of the Eisenhower and Kennedy eras on Puerto Rico. Note any changes in the U. S. relationship with its island territory.
4. Lead a debate about Mami's success as head of the family in Brooklyn and during Papi's long absences. Explain how she copes with Papi's lies and deceptions, his adultery, frequent changes of residence, failure of their family business, his marriage, lack of money for food and clothing, and his hidden family consisting of Provi and her daughter Margie.

Literature

1. Read aloud from nonfiction, novels, plays, speeches, and stories that describe incidents of immigration and displacement similar to the transplanting of Mami and her children to Brooklyn. Include Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar*, Joseph Bruchac's *Bowman's Store*, Isak Dinesen's *Babette's Feast*, Cathy Song's *The Picture Bride*, Ruthann Lum McCunn's *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*, Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent*, Willa Cather's *My Antonia*, Gish Jen's *Typical American*, Yoko Kawashima Watkins's *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, and *The Kitchen God's Wife*, T. Coraghessan Boyle's *The Tortilla Curtain*, John Van Druten's *I Remember Mama*, Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Carmen Deedy's *Growing Up Cuban*, Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust*, Isabel Allende's *Daughter of Fortune*, and Betty Mahmoody's *Not Without My Daughter*.
2. Explain in a theme the significance of the title. Propose reasons why Negi stopped feeling completely Puerto Rican, yet was unable to be completely American.
3. Write a theme in which you explain the role of a minor character, such as Tato, Don Berto, Angie, Cony, Leona, Chico, Francisco, Generosa, Delsa, Raymond, Jenny, Nicasia, Gladys, Lalo, Susana, Julio, or Juanita Marín. Create a part for yourself, such as a classmate, neighbor, boyfriend, or teacher of Negi.

Alternate Assessment

1. List examples of upheaval and discontent in the lives of the characters, for example, Negi's anger at Papi for lying about picking her up on Sunday, Mami's need to work in a factory, Héctor's infected foot, Gloria's escape, Cony's fear of burying her infant with his eyes open, Tata's alcoholism, Don Julio's fear of subway stations, Tato's demand to see Negi's genitals, and Papi's love for Margie.
2. Compile a list of actions and statements that demonstrate a double standard, particularly Papi's insistence on spending time away from home, Papi's refusal to marry Mami, Negi's wildness and unladylike behavior, Mami's injunctions to Negi before she becomes a *senorita*, and neighborhood shunning of Mami after she gets a factory job.
3. Compose a scene in which Papi arrives in New York to visit his children and to attend Negi's graduation from the performing arts school.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each, including: Chico's sexual abuse of a minor, Generosa's poor menu planning, Luis's vulgar treatment of his piano student, Delsa's tattling to Mami, Jenny's gloating over a new bicycle, Papi's scattering of his children among relatives, Lalo's exploitation of child labor, Abuela's neglect of Abuelo, Leona's denigration of a *jíbara*, Negi's violence in the school yard, Tato's obsession with seeing female genitals, and Mami's anger at Papi's *puta*.
5. Account for the changes in Negi in her twelfth and thirteenth years.

Vocabulary Test

Complete the following passage with appropriate words from the list below. You will have answers left over when you finish.

abandon, aptitude, barrio, conscience, convoluted, ecstasy, frenzy, frond, implications, lustrous, maim, methodical, nimbus, repentance, relinquish, reserve, reverberating, sedate, stupefied, synchronization, timbre, transformations, utilitarian, wont

Don Joaquín had worked himself into a (1) _____ that sent the congregation to its feet, moaning their (2) _____ and the (3) _____ of redemption. Men and women who until that day had been (4) _____ citizens—a solemn storekeeper, the unsmiling man who delivered the mail, the stern school crossing guard, the (5) _____ newspaper (6) _____—stood up in a rapture. These proper folk, who had always maintained an appearance of peaceful (7) _____, now rolled in the aisles with (8) _____. Don Joaquín's voice rose in (9) _____ and pitch, until he seemed to disappear and only his words remained, (10) _____ against the cement walls, piercing the assembled into (11) _____ convulsions and ecstatic trances. Every hair on my body stood on end as I witnessed these (12) _____. A bristling sweat (13) _____ into my clothes, dribbled behind my ears. I wanted to wail. But my fear was too great, my (14) _____ too precocious to allow me to (15) _____ control of my well-guarded soul.

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Quotation Identification (30 points)

Identify the speaker of each of the following quotations from the memoir and explain the significance.

_____ 1. Filthy old man!

_____ 2. They think we're taking their jobs.

_____ 3. What do you want to be when you grow up?

_____ 4. You're not Mami. You can't order us around.

_____ 5. We have to fast before church.

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

_____ 1. On Johannes's first visit to the house, Negi insults him.

_____ 2. Mami allows the amputation of Héctor's foot in a Brooklyn Hospital.

_____ 3. For a year, Mami mourns Francisco's death from terminal cancer.

_____ 4. The American factory boss immediately promotes Mami to a sewing machine.

_____ 5. Chico's flirtation with Negi makes her feel more feminine.

_____ 6. Mami meets privately with the school principal to admonish him for staring at Negi's breasts.

_____ 7. Mami and Papi blame Negi for allowing Héctor to ride Jenny's bicycle.

_____ 8. Negi negotiates with the principal for her entry into eighth grade.

_____ 9. Mami admonishes Negi about neglecting a daughter's obligation to her father.

_____ 10. Tata's drinking and her relationship with Don Julio create a rift in the family.

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: Completion (20 points)

Fill each blank below with a word or phrase that completes the sentence.

1. _____ tells Negi how Christopher Columbus discovered Puerto Rico and how the _____ seized it in 1898.
2. Negi's family moves to a hut in _____, where Papi installs a _____, a kerosene stove, and a separate kitchen.
3. The family gathers at _____'s house when a _____ strikes the island.
4. Negi visits _____ and Angie while Mami takes _____ to a doctor in New York.
5. After _____ marries, Delsa, Norma, Héctor, and _____ join Mami in Brooklyn.

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences on the essay response page.

1. Describe the influence of Puerto Rican womanhood on Negi's relationship with Mami.
2. Explain community services to Puerto Ricans during an election.
3. Discuss the influence of Negi's mentor after the audition.
4. Account for ongoing arguments between Mami and Papi.
5. Summarize events that precede the final move to New York.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Matching (30 points)

Match the following descriptions with names of characters from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- | | | |
|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| A. Jenny | F. Negi | K. Gloria |
| B. Don Lalo | G. Mrs. García | L. landlord |
| C. Andrea | H. Luis | M. Margara |
| D. Higinio | I. Johannes | N. Berto |
| E. Ramona | J. Margie | O. Abuela |

- _____ 1. instructs Negi on how to cross herself
- _____ 2. gives lessons while Papi hammers
- _____ 3. vomits from the taste of peanut butter in powdered milk
- _____ 4. requires Negi to peel hot potatoes
- _____ 5. sells oranges
- _____ 6. explains menstruation to Negi
- _____ 7. shows off a new bicycle
- _____ 8. teaches crocheting
- _____ 9. was born in Kentucky
- _____ 10. buys Negi a yellow purse
- _____ 11. keeps a pig behind the bar
- _____ 12. travels to New York with Provi
- _____ 13. lines up children at the centro comunal
- _____ 14. predicts that Negi's arm will stick out of her coffin
- _____ 15. is mourned with novenas

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

Supply a word or phrase in answer to the following questions. Place your response in the blank provided.

- _____ 1. How does Negi cultivate a gardenia bush?
- _____ 2. Who tattles to Mami?
- _____ 3. Where does Papi enjoy solitude?
- _____ 4. Who is curious about Margie?
- _____ 5. What does Negi pretend to pick up from the floor?
- _____ 6. What does Juanita stir into her milk?
- _____ 7. What does Mami sew for Negi after Negi becomes a senorita?
- _____ 8. What university does Negi attend?
- _____ 9. What word does Papi forbid in reference to Americans?
- _____ 10. In what year of her common-law marriage does Mami leave Papi?

Comprehension Test B

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Select the phrase that completes each of the following sentences. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- _____ 1. Before the hot oven,
A. Julio cooks a welcoming meal for Mami's three children.
B. Mami and Papi fight over the puta.
C. Negi tells stories.
D. Gloria makes oatmeal three times a day.
- _____ 2. After the hurricane,
A. Papi remains home regularly with the children.
B. villagers need cash.
C. Negi flirts with Johannes at the creek bank.
D. Mami insists on closing Cony's dead infant's eyes.
- _____ 3. Miss Brown
A. teaches 8-23.
B. illustrates the dangers of intestinal worms.
C. listens to a recitation from *The Silver Cord*.
D. asks Negi to translate for non-English-speaking women.
- _____ 4. Negi memorizes
A. the order of questions on the welfare form.
B. the address of la marketa.
C. rules for using a tilde.
D. "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean."
- _____ 5. Negi punches
A. Monín in the stomach.
B. Héctor for causing the destruction of a new bicycle.
C. Papi for lying about picking her up on Sunday.
D. Doña Lola for forcing the children to leave during Héctor's birth.
- _____ 6. Negi conceals homesickness by
A. going to an evangelical service.
B. mashing her finger in the door.
C. writing a Father's Day letter to Papi.
D. mixing only with Morenos.
- _____ 7. Doña Susana watches the children at
A. the pre-election breakfasts.
B. Generosa's house.
C. the airport.
D. Iglesia San Juan Bautista.
- _____ 8. In exchange for piano lessons,
A. Negi irons shirts.
B. Monín cooks for bar patrons.
C. Papi works on a porch.
D. Nicasia invites Negi to visit with Gladys and Angie.
- _____ 9. The truck driver
A. provides Negi with a first sexual experience.
B. moves the family's kerosene stove into the new kitchen.
C. works at Roosevelt Air Base.
D. helps residents remove outbuildings damaged in the hurricane.
- _____ 10. Franky's birth
A. requires hospitalization for Mami.
B. occurs one day after Francisco's death.
C. adds an eighth child to the family.
D. causes Papi to abandon his children to relatives.

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences on the essay response page.

1. Explain how Mami changes over time.
2. Contrast Mami, Papi, Lalo, Gloria, and Tata as caregivers.
3. Describe Negi's experience with Don Luis.
4. Account for Mami's need to return to New York.
5. Explain Negi's failure to appear on the first day of school.

Answer Key

Vocabulary

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1. frenzy | 11. delirious |
| 2. repentance | 12. transformations |
| 3. ecstasy | 13. seeped |
| 4. sedate | 14. conscience |
| 5. methodical | 15. relinquish |
| 6. vendor | |
| 7. reserve | |
| 8. abandon | |
| 9. timbre | |
| 10. reverberating | |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Quotation Identification (30 points)

1. Negi
2. Mami
3. Mr. Barone
4. Delsa
5. Abuela

Part II: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. T |
| 2. F | 7. F |
| 3. T | 8. T |
| 4. F | 9. T |
| 5. F | 10. F |

Part III: Completion (20 points)

1. Papi, United States
2. Macún, floor
3. Doña Ana, hurricane
4. Gladys, Raymond
5. Papi, Alicia

Part VI: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Matching (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. O | 6. K | 11. L |
| 2. H | 7. A | 12. J |
| 3. F | 8. M | 13. G |
| 4. B | 9. I | 14. C |
| 5. D | 10. E | 15. N |

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

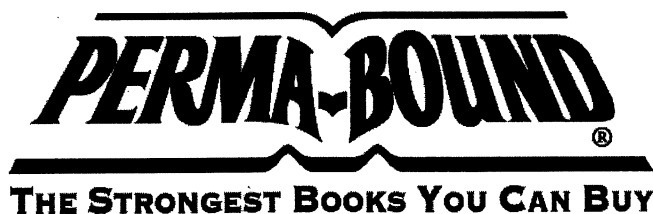
- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. by watering it | 6. peanut butter |
| 2. Delsa | 7. bra |
| 3. tool shed | 8. Harvard |
| 4. Negi | 9. gringo |
| 5. broken Christmas ornament | 10. fourteenth |

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. B |
| 2. B | 7. D |
| 3. A | 8. C |
| 4. D | 9. A |
| 5. A | 10. C |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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